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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 341

SUBJECT: Significance of Current Communist Tactics

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1. There is no longer any reason to doubt that the recent acts and statements of the Soviet and Chinese Communist governments mark a change of Communist tactics. The number and nature of these acts, the swiftness with which they have followed one upon another, the prominence given them by the Communist press and radio, the high authority of the Communist leaders involved, and the fact that these unexpected developments began to occur almost immediately upon the death of Stalin all indicate, and were probably intended by the Kremlin to indicate, that a change has taken place in the manner of conducting Soviet policy. For the time being the Communists have adopted a conciliatory approach both at home and abroad.

2. There is no evidence that the ultimate objectives of the Soviet rulers have changed, or that they have hitherto been misunderstood in the West. The threat of Soviet armed forces remains as great as before; the menace of communism to the free world is undiminished, and the hostility of the Kremlin to the West is almost certainly unaltered. It is Communist tactics and not Communist aims which have changed.

3. This change of tactics may indicate no more than that the Kremlin hopes by a series of conciliatory moves involving no substantial

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concessions to weaken military strength and political cohesions of the Western alliance and to postpone or confuse the decisions of the new US administration. The Soviets have already seized the diplomatic and propaganda initiative by their maneuvers. By continuing to make minor gestures at little expense, such as the release of sick and wounded prisoners in Korea, the repatriation of Japanese prisoners of war and Japanese fishermen, the freeing of Oatis and Sanders, the settlement of lend-lease obligations, and similar moves, the Kremlin may expect to keep the new peace offensive alive for a considerable time.

4. On the other hand, the change in Communist tactics may signify that the Kremlin has decided to make substantial concessions, and to negotiate on some important issues with a view to reaching agreement rather than solely with a view to waging political warfare. The aims of such a policy would be the same as those mentioned in the preceding paragraph, but in addition this policy would be designed to insure an extended period of calm for building the strength of the Soviet Bloc and for consolidating the power of the new Soviet rulers, while confidently awaiting the inevitable decline and fall of capitalism. This is not to say that the Soviet will accede to all Western demands, or that they will press on to a settlement of all outstanding issues. The Kremlin would undoubtedly drive the hardest possible bargains, but it would do so with the intention of arriving at an agreement.

5. The situation is developing so rapidly, and new evidence is appearing so abundantly, that any estimate of the meaning of the new

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Soviet tactics may be out of date before it is written. The entire series of events since the announcement of Stalin's death has occupied less than a month. It would be futile to expect that a change of Soviet policy could, in such a short time, produce anything more than gestures and statements. On balance we believe that the Soviets have in fact changed their approach to the West, that they intend to make substantial concessions on some points, and to negotiate agreements if possible on various important outstanding issues. In particular we believe that the Communists are now prepared to accept voluntary repatriation of prisoners in Korea and a Korean armistice, provided this can be done in such a way as to conceal the Communist abandonment of principle and provided the West is willing to pay the Communist price. This price will probably seem high to the US, but it will almost certainly be designed to appear reasonable to the allies of the US and to the rest of the non-Communist world.